

SOME SUGGESTIONS

FOR A

FINAL SETTLEMENT

OF

THE LAND QUESTION

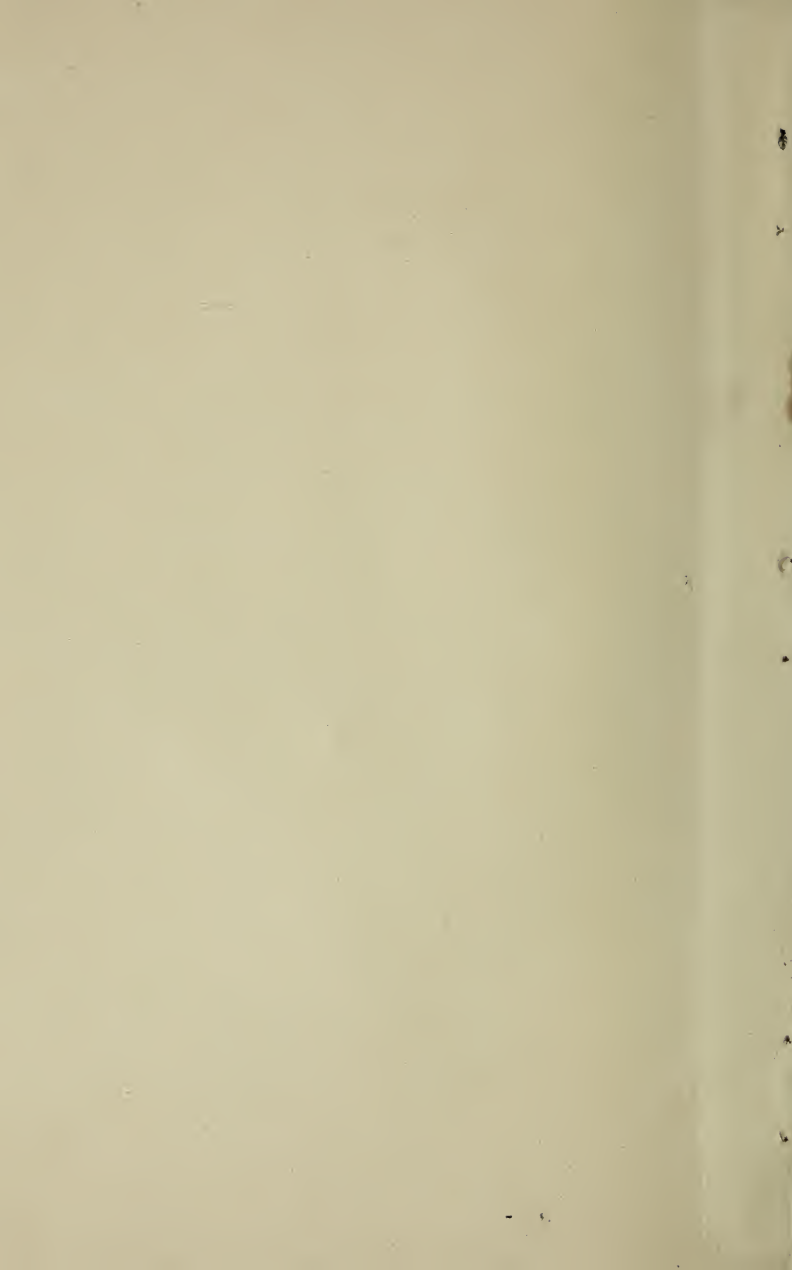
BY

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1902

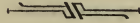


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PREFACE.



To place only a solitary brick in the edifice of a new and satisfactory Irish Land System should be a labour of genuine pride and satisfaction to any Irishman who loves his country, and it is with this modest ambition I venture to put before the public the suggestions, old and new, which this little pamphlet offers as my contribution to the present discussion—How best and soonest to end the Irish agrarian war.

While agreeing that the country should press on with unabated resolve the campaign for a final ending of the landlord system of land tenure, I believe the people's representatives should be ready and willing to discuss, at any time, any broad plans of settlement which the landlords or their delegated spokesmen may wish to be considered as a basis of possible peace. An armistice is not needed for this purpose, more especially when the Dublin Castle allies of the landlords' party are filling the prisons with the leaders and lieutenants of the popular movement. Peace in this as in other righteous conflicts will come the sooner by a vigorous prosecution of a just and necessary war.

A sovereign remedy for the evil we all wish to cure is not a possession of any man or party. The problem before us would be easy of satisfactory

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solution if it were so. The difficulties are many and great, while the complexities of the question are interwoven with conflicting interests, which clamour for selfish, rather than equitable or national, consideration at the hands of whatever person, party or conference attempts to put forward any final plan of settlement.

“The common sense of most,” when gathered from the proposals of rival sides, and from the general sense of the country as indicated in public discussion, will, in all likelihood, suggest and shape the ultimate lines of adjustment. While no individual plan or scheme may possess the merit of forcing general acceptance, each proposal may possibly contain something that will add a useful help or hint towards the desired end. It is in this sense that I venture to add my quota to the present controversy over conferences, and what they should and may be able to do in framing some successful plan for securing agrarian peace.

M. D.

Dalkey, Co. Dublin,

October, 7th, 1902.

I.

SOME OLD AND NEW SUGGESTIONS.

I AM believed by some to be the most intransigent of the "agitators." Colonel Saunderson has recently declined Captain Shawe Taylor's invitation to attend the proposed round-table conference, on the ground, among others, that he knew quite well already what the Nationalist leaders were prepared to give in return for the estates of himself and his class, and that he could count upon nothing from me except "a single ticket from Kingstown to Holyhead." The genial member for North Armagh had retained in an imperfect memory seven words of a speech of mine delivered in Liverpool in June, 1882, which contained, among some four thousand other words, the following proposals:—

"The question of compensation is practically the only one now left to discuss in connection with the fate of Irish landlordism. I start with the proposition that, in accordance with strict justice, the landlords of Ireland are not entitled to their fares from Kingstown to Holyhead for the loss of their criminally abused proprietary rights; but, as conventional justice or the claims of prescriptive right cannot possibly be repudiated by the English Government or avoided by Ireland, if a peaceful settlement of the land war is to be arrived at, we must face the question of compensation. Well, according to even conventional justice, those who by their enterprise and labour have given the pre-

sent value to the land of Ireland are surely entitled to their share of its market price. In other words, the farmer's property in the soil which he alone has improved by his industry and capital, must be equal in value to that claimed by the landlord in virtue of either purchase or prescriptive right. Leaving his property to the farmer, we shall only have to deal with the landlord's share. To determine this it would be necessary to arrive at an estimate of the intrinsic worth of the land anterior to the increment of its value by the present generation. In the time of Dean Swift the annual rental of Ireland was but £2,000,000 ; to-day it is about £15,000,000. Will any one conversant with the history of Irish landlordism since that date hesitate to say whether this increased value is due to the landlord or to the people of Ireland? Taking the farmers' and the landlords' interests to be equal, the latter's share of the market price of the land of Ireland now would be twenty years' purchase of half the present annual rental, or £140,000,000. This sum I would propose to raise either by public loan or by the issue of Government bonds bearing 3 per cent. interest, principal and interest to be chargeable to Ireland's contribution to the Imperial revenue. Thus, an annual revenue from Ireland of, say, £7,000,000 would provide interest on £140,000,000 at 3 per cent. per annum (amounting to £4,200,000), leaving an annual balance of £2,800,000 for a sinking fund with which to pay off the principal. This it would do in a period of about fifty years ; the land tax, say, of 10 per cent. upon all land values supplying the expenditure for the civil

administration, now met by such revenue. By this plan of settlement Ireland itself would get rid of landlordism without touching the pockets of the English taxpayers; a compensation would be given to the landlords to which, in strict justice, they are not entitled; all incentives to social discontent would be removed; agrarian outrage would of necessity disappear from the absence of landlord tyranny and conflicting agrarian interests, while the country could not fail to begin a new life of peace, contentment, and prosperity."

The Times of the 7th of June, 1882, reported this Liverpool speech verbatim, and in its Editorial comment thereon, *inter alia*, said:—"It is characteristic of Mr. Davitt's cast of mind that he believes in the accomplishment of his plan without wrong to any man, without loss to the State, with full compensation to vested interests, and with relief to the taxpayer as well as to the tenant." *The Times* did not approve of this scheme of settlement, but it recognised in a spirit of fair comment (what neither Colonel Saunderson nor Mr. T. M. Healy were willing to remember when referring a few days ago to this "Ticket-from-Kingstown-to-Holyhead" rate of compensation to Irish landlords), that I had offered just, and even generous, terms as the price of agrarian peace in Ireland.

The annual rental of Ireland mentioned in this rough plan must have been intended to include the ground rents of cities and towns as well as agricultural rents, and hence the estimated figure of £15,000,000. The calculation that the annual earnings of Irish agricultural industry would amount to some one hundred

millions was also equally excessive. No such revenue from Irish land has to be considered in connection with present-day proposals, and I only recall this twenty year old plan of mine now for the sake of the idea which it sought to enforce—the buying out of the landlords by Irish taxes as well as by British credit.

II.

LAND NATIONALISATION V. OCCUPYING OWNERSHIP.

MANY things have changed in Ireland since this somewhat crude scheme of final settlement was thought out in a cell in the Infirmary of Portland Convict Prison, in 1881, and included in the speech referred to.

The Land Act of the same year, and the abatements in rent which followed, have materially altered the rental relations between landlord and tenant. The basis of purchase must now be found in the judicial rents, in their latest revision, taken together with the average selling price of the landlords' interest in the purchase market. Other considerations will also tend to influence the fixing of the rate of compensation—whether, for instance, the landlords will co-operate with the people of Ireland in effecting a final agrarian peace, on a plan satisfactory to all Irish interests concerned; or, whether they will rely, instead, upon an English Party or Ministry for terms seasoned with continued coercion. For my part, I would make it a case of

justice generously measured, in one case, in exchange for surer guarantees of peace; and justice sternly and jealously exacted where party antipathies and vindictive powers were sought for in the making of any final agreement. For, it is well to bear in mind, in this connection, that the tenants are the only possible buyers, and that the whole country (minus the landlords) favours both the principle and policy of compulsory purchase—Ulster being as strongly for this radical remedy (if such remedy be necessary) as the South or West of Ireland.

Whether compulsion will be required in bringing about a universally-wished-for settlement will depend mainly upon the spirit and disposition shown by the landlord class in the consideration of any scheme of which the country may, generally, approve. The question of terms will probably decide their action. Humanly speaking they cannot be blamed for trying to obtain the best terms possible. On the other hand, the country will have an equal interest in seeing a plan of settlement carried out which will free its chief industry from depressing burthens, and give to the whole community the most hopeful of prospects for a final cessation of agrarian strife. In a word, the fullest justice to the landlords, as the price of peace, and an equal regard for the immediate future welfare and contentment of our entire agricultural population are the two essential requisites for effecting what I will call a rational and Irish scheme of final settlement.

I must, I deeply regret, admit that a plan of Land Nationalisation such] as I] hoped amidst the many

pleasing dreams of Portland Prison might for ever solve the Irish agrarian problem will not recommend itself to the people of Ireland. I tried in four or five years of patient and uphill propaganda in the early eighties to recommend such a settlement to the country. The feeling of our race in America and Australia was also tested by me in the same direction in later years, but with the same result. The plan was either disliked, or misunderstood, or the principle on which it rested—national, as against individual, lordship of the soil—did not appeal to the strong human desire or passion to hold the land as “owner” which is so inherent in Celtic nature. In addition to all this, the preponderating political force of Ireland resides in the tenant-farmer class, and most public men, naturally enough, advocate such changes and reforms as the predominant feeling and desires of the constituencies most strongly favour. Popular sentiment was undoubtedly behind Mr. Parnell when he virtually contested this issue with me in 1883 and 1884, and though, singularly enough, he came round almost completely to my views after the unhappy split of 1890, the country has remained, as far as I can judge, overwhelmingly for an “occupier ownership” of the land as against the “national ownership” which Fintan Lalor passionately pleaded for after the great Famine, and which I have urged almost in vain upon the acceptance of the Nationalists of my time.

I still hold fondly and firmly to this great principle, and I believe a National ownership to be the only true meaning of the battle cry of the Land League—The

Land for the People—but there are some faiths which cannot move Irish mountains, and I have to confess that mine has proved to be one of them.

On the other hand, it is pretty generally acknowledged that an “occupying ownership” is not to mean a simple transfer of the land of the country from landlords to tenants with an unlimited power of lordship and control which was not possessed by the present territorial class. Ownership of land, in any absolute sense, has never been the recognised or acknowledged right of any class in any country, for obvious and natural reasons. It is, in fact, humanly impossible to own land as a ship or any moveable, or manufactured object of value is owned. Ownership must therefore be qualified by obligation, or duty or tax to the State which will recognise the conditions on which the community at large (the country as a whole) will allow the natural heritage of the people in the soil to be so owned, occupied, or exploited by any section. The misuse of this conditional right by the present landlords, to the consequent unrest and material injury of the whole community, is the chief reason why a system more in conformity with the economic requirements of Ireland and the dictates of natural justice is now imperiously demanded by the whole people.

Moreover, the whole people, in their collective capacity as “the country,” have both direct and indirect rights, interests and claims that must be duly taken into account, if a settlement of a final character is to be secured. The country must be collectively responsible for the financial obligations involved in the change of

land systems. Its taxes must, in a great measure, provide the means of compensating the landlords. The health and welfare of its chief industry are vitally concerned in both the nature and the terms of the settlement to be carried out. Agricultural labourers have industrial claims on the land which demand the fullest protection from possible class injustice, while almost every other section of the labouring, trading, and professional community possess, as citizens, and as tax and ratepayers, in what is virtually an agricultural country, claims to consideration only less in degree than the actual occupiers of the soil in the fixing of the future land system of Ireland.

There is, likewise, the danger of gombeen landlordism to be avoided—namely, the sub-letting of holdings and the creation of a petty rent-paying system by the emancipated peasant proprietors. If for no other end than this the country could not forego its moral and social right to claim and exercise a restraining power upon the probable misuse of the privileges of ownership by a large section of the new land holders. This is no phantom danger, but a potential evil which must be provided against if another, and possibly a worse, form of agrarian trouble is not to follow from an attempted remedy for the existing source of peasant discontent and recurring periods of distress and disturbance.

III.

WHAT A PRACTICAL PLAN MUST INCLUDE.

ANY plan of settlement which is to command a reasonable chance of adoption by Ireland, as a whole, by tenants and landlords, and last, but by no means least, by the British Parliament, must, I take it, embrace and include—

1. Provisions for the payment of a just compensation to the landlords for the sale of their ownership rights in the land to the tenants and the country.

2. A system of “occupying ownership,” which shall mean for the present tenant—

- (a) The effective possession and enjoyment of his full tenant right, or property, in his holding with the privilege to dispose of this subject to reasonable conditions for preventing land usury ;
- (b) The unquestioned right of perpetual “ownership” subject to some just and reasonable obligation due to the country in return for the recognition of such right of undisturbed occupancy and the protection of same ; and
- (c) A considerable reduction in the rental obligation that must lie on the holding during the period in which the cost of purchase must be redeemed—that is, a lesser charge than the present judicial rent.

3. Conditions of recognised ownership which will entitle the country, or the State, to effectively prevent sub-letting, except under exceptional circumstances.

4. Provisions for the enlargement of holdings in congested areas ; and

5. Due attention to the industrial claims of the agricultural labouring class for better opportunities of employment upon the land.

IV.

A REMARKABLE CONSENSUS OF OPINION.

THE scheme of settlement which was outlined in *The Statist* in 1886 would, with some little amendment, include the above conditions. Mr. (now Sir Robert) Giffen, the eminent economist, was the author of this proposal, which in its chief feature corresponded with the suggestion contained in my Portland Prison plan of making Ireland's contribution to the Imperial Exchequer the main source and security for the financial execution of the scheme, and in giving Ireland, in return, a direct revenue-interest in the future land system of the country.

This proposal was not, unfortunately, adopted by Mr. Gladstone in his dual plan for settling the whole Irish Question in 1886, though it received an extraordinary amount of warm approval from all sides.

The late Mr. Parnell, speaking in the House of Commons at the opening of the Parliamentary Session of 1886, said :—

“Some scheme of purchase may be devised on the lines understood to be suggested by that eminent statistician, Mr. Giffen, in a recent letter, under which

it may be possible—I do not pledge myself to the details—but generally under which it may be possible to purchase for a bulk sum the land in the occupation of the agricultural tenants.”

Addressing a letter to Mr. Gladstone, dated the 17th February, 1886, the Catholic Hierarchy of Ireland made the following reference to this scheme of settlement :—

“As regards ‘the settlement of the Land Question,’ we have no hesitation whatever in stating that, in our opinion, it now imperatively calls for a final solution, and that this cannot be better effected than by some such measure as that which certain English journalists and statesmen have recently advocated—that is, the purchase by the Government of the landlord interest in the soil, and the re-letting of the latter to tenant farmers at a figure very considerably below the present judicial rents.”

A writer in the *Fortnightly Review* for February, 1886, generally accepted by the Press to be Mr. Joseph Chamberlain* (and never denied by him), recommended this scheme as follows :—

“The scheme published by *The Statist* newspaper, and which has been attributed to Mr. Giffen, has been objected to in some of its details, and it certainly appears to contemplate too large a payment to the existing land owners; while the amount of grants from the Exchequer to local purposes seems to be estimated too highly. But, in any case, the fact remains that such grants are made annually to a very large extent,

* See Appendix.

and that they represent a capital sum which affords the basis for an immense operation in the way of land purchase, and of the municipalisation of the land of Ireland by its transfer to local authorities, who may be invited and empowered, under proper conditions devised to prevent sub-letting and the recreation of the landlord class, to deal with the existing tenants, and to give them full and independent rights of ownership, subject to a quit-rent of very much less than the present payment."

V.

GIFFEN'S AND ARCHBISHOP CROKE'S
PROPOSALS.

SIR ROBERT GIFFEN'S plan, as first outlined in *The Statist*, was somewhat obscure on one or two important points, and the following letter from the late Archbishop Croke invited the author to re-state and make clearer his proposals. This he did in reply to this friendly communication and criticism :—

ECONOMIST'S' PLAN.

(To the Editor of *The Statist*.)

"SIR,—You are right in assuming that I approve of the principal or main features of the proposal for the settlement of the Irish Land Question which appeared in a recent issue of *The Statist* over the signature of 'Economist.' The principal, as I take it, substantially is that the

interest of existing landlords should be purchased out and the land given to the tenants, subject to a rent-charge amounting to considerably less than the present judicial rents.

“I am not financier enough to be able to say precisely or nearly so what sum would be required to effect such a purpose, but I am strongly inclined to think that the rental of Ireland, even if calculated on the basis of the judicial rents already settled, would not reach the high figure £8,000,000 annually, at which your correspondent ‘Economist’ appears to estimate it. Six millions, or seven at the farthest, would, in my humble opinion, come nearer to the mark.

“Moreover, I am thoroughly satisfied, and indeed have good reason to know, that judicial rents generally, and notably those that have been fixed for the last two years, are entirely too high. It is furthermore absolutely certain that the tenant farmers of Ireland will not be recommended to accept any scheme under which landlords would receive anything like twenty years’ purchase for their lands. So considering those points, and others which might be suggested, it appears to me a sum considerably less than £160,000,000 would be sufficient to buy up the interest of Irish landlords, and that consequently £4,000,000 annually, the amount of local expenditure from Imperial sources in Ireland, would amply meet the interest of Consols required for the purpose.

“Of course the details of such a proposal as that set forth by ‘Economist’ would require much careful consideration; but I for one would very gladly accept

any reasonable plan that would put an end to the system of landlordism that has so long and so ruinously existed in Ireland. At the same time I should be sorry to see the actual owners of the soil, however undeserving as a class, put out of possession without receiving from some source a fair equivalent for their property. The leaders of Irish opinion do not aim at confiscation; they ask only for fair play, just as in the matter of Home Rule they simply claim for their countrymen the right of making their own laws and managing their own affairs, and do not dream of separation from England even as a possible result.

“I remain, &c.,

“✠ T. W. CROKE,

“Archbishop of Cashel.”

(*The Statist*, February 6th, 1886.)

To the Editor of *The Statist*.

“SIR,—Having been enabled by your courtesy to see a proof of the Archbishop of Cashel’s letter, dated the 29th January, I take the opportunity to add a few observations.

“1. I should be quite disposed to believe that when we come to business it will be found that the effective rent which Irish landlords will have to sell and the Government to buy will not be so much as eight millions. As my letter showed, I had no intention to name an exact figure which would be equitable in the circumstances—I only named a figure which would give a

general idea of the subject, and which would probably exceed and not be less than the real effective rent that would have to be dealt with. It is for those acquainted in detail with the circumstances of Ireland, with the conditions of past valuations and the methods in fixing judicial rents in different localities with the exact incidence of rates, which would appear in some cases to diminish the effective interest, the landlords will have to sell, to make the necessary calculations, if such a scheme as I suggested is to be tried at all.

“2. As to the number of years purchase to be paid, twenty years was equally no more than a suggestion on my part. What ought to be the normal number of years’ purchase to be given to Irish landlords on the compulsory expropriation of their property is a question that could only be answered after much study of many facts, and which could only now be answered approximately by those acquainted with the circumstances and selling value of land in Ireland in former times, when there was less agitation and doubt about rents than there have lately been. It is obvious, however, that if the Irish landlord is to be bought out, not upon a nominal, but upon an effective, rent, the number of years purchase ought to be higher than it was customary to give when the nominal rental was the basis of the calculation. In suggesting twenty years I was desirous not to suggest too low a figure. It was important to show that the scheme was practicable even if the landlord got very good terms.

“3. In my former letter I assumed what appeared to be true on the face of the figures—that if the Imperial

Government bought out the Irish landlords on the terms suggested, and gave the new rentcharge to the Irish local authorities in return for the withdrawal of contributions from the Imperial Exchequer to the internal administration of Ireland, it would be Ireland and not Great Britain that would gain by the plan. We would assume a burden on the one hand costing £4,800,000 a year. We were only to be relieved on the other hand of an annual charge of £4,000,000. The exact figure of the latter charge, I may say, according to the last finance and revenue accounts, is £3,800,000, apart from an average annual loss by loans to Ireland, which would bring up the total to very nearly £4,000,000, if not rather over that figure. So far there would appear to be a new charge of £800,000 upon the Imperial Exchequer involved, and I suggested that it might be equitable to require the local authorities in Ireland to contribute to the Imperial Exchequer the difference between the annuity of £4,800,000 we should have to pay to the landlords and the annual charge for the internal administration of Ireland of which we would be relieved.

“I am satisfied, however, on further consideration of the subject, that the arrangement does not really involve any large concession by Great Britain. At present Ireland pays more in taxes than its fair share, comparing its resources with those of Great Britain. The figures are not quite certain, but the Irish tax-payer appears to contribute £6,700,000* to the Imperial Exchequer, whereas his proper contribution ought not to

* He contributes fully £2,000,000 more, now.

be about half that sum. If Ireland contributed proportionately, however, it would only be entitled to have spent upon it in return for purposes of internal administration £800,000 a year—a twentieth part, that is, of the total sum spent on the internal administration of Great Britain and Ireland—instead of £4,000,000 which is practically now spent in Ireland. The Imperial Exchequer thus gets out of Ireland in the first place about £3,200,000 more than it ought to get, and then spends upon the internal administration of Ireland the whole amount. The expenditure does not benefit Ireland as it ought to do, because it is largely waste; but neither does Britain gain.

“The effect of the proposed arrangement would be—

“1. That we should cease to spend on Ireland the £4,000,000 we now spend—both the £800,000 to which Ireland would be entitled if it only contributed originally in proportion to its resources, and the £3,200,000 additional that we spend, and in so doing return to Ireland an apparent equivalent for the excess taxation received from Ireland; and

“2. That we should burthen ourselves in exchange with a new annuity of £4,800,000 to Irish landlords. If the latter annuity should be reduced to £4,000,000 the account would be balanced as far as Great Britain is concerned, but Ireland would gain absolutely nothing in return for its disproportionate contributions to the Imperial Exchequer. It is entitled to about £4,000,000 a year from that Exchequer for the purposes of internal administration—the rent-charge it is proposed to give over to the Irish Local authorities is only an equivalent for the latter sum.

“ Where both parties would gain by the transaction would be, as far as Great Britain is concerned, by the substitution of an amicable for a hostile Ireland, if that should be the happy result, and, as far as Ireland is concerned, by the relief of the tenants from the difference between the excessive rents which they now pay and the rent-charge to be constituted. In other respects the arrangement seems strictly equitable or nearly so, and it cannot be said that it is a large concession to Ireland. If Ireland were to demand now a strict account of its contributions to the Imperial Exchequer it would be very difficult to show that it gets value for the excess it contributes beyond the fair proportion to its resources. It is easy for us to say that the taxes are indiscriminate, the only exception being that Ireland is exempted from some of them. If in point of fact the taxes are of such a nature that they effectively discriminate between Great Britain and Ireland, so that the taxpayers of the poorer country pay in fact more than their share, the latter have a clear right to the consideration of the fact in the disposal of the proceeds. By this plan suggested Ireland will have a real equivalent and no more.

“ I am, sir, &c.,

“ ECONOMIST.”

(*The Statist*, February 6th, 1886.)

Both Archbishop Croke and Sir Robert Giffen manifestly intended the scheme thus generally outlined to be a part of the then contemplated pacification of

Ireland, which Mr. Gladstone subsequently attempted to carry out in his Home Rule Bill of 1886. Taking the Giffen proposals in that sense, I ventured to sketch a plan of settlement in an article in the *Contemporary Review* for April of that year, in which I dealt with the plan on Land Nationalisation lines under an Irish National State. This plan would not meet the requirements of the present situation. Mr. Chamberlain considered the proposals at the time from the point of view of constituting a "local authority" for both the settlement and administration of the Land Question; and as none of the suggested conferences of to-day appear to contemplate anything beyond trying to find a solution of this same problem, the Giffen scheme must be considered from this restricted standpoint, and be necessarily modified both in the extent and in the manner of its application.

VI.

NOMINAL AND NET RENTS.

WHAT this plan suggests, now, in the light of Ireland's preference for an occupying ownership, and in view of a possible concurrence between landlords' and tenants' representatives upon some final agreement, is, How can the principle approved of by Mr. Parnell, Archbishop Croke, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain and others be applied to the working out of a scheme such as the proposed conference are expected to favour?

Two apparently antagonistic proposals seem to constitute the rough-and-ready plans of the landlords

and tenants, as explained by some of their authorised advocates: "Give us," say the landlords, "the largest possible number of years purchase for our properties." "Obtain for us," say the tenants, "the greatest possible amount of reduction in our rents," neither side caring, evidently, what intermediate interest or entity has to bear the cost or burthen of what is expected to satisfy both extremes. Here is where Ireland, or the country, comes in, in the transactions, and it is for Ireland as a whole, rather than for landlords or tenants, I am hoping to suggest a scheme of settlement which may do full justice to both extremes and do something for the country as well.

Clearly it will not be possible for any plan or scheme to be placed before any conference as containing definite proposals until the effective, or net, rental of properties is ascertained. Given the exact annual value of what the landlord receives for himself after defraying costs and expenses which will cease when he sells his estate; after rates and taxes are deducted and bad debts are allowed for, which are all included in the nominal or judicial rent, and then, and only then, can fair compensation be measured out in the final bargaining for peace. Assuming that £8,000,000 will represent the present judicial or nominal rental of the land yearly; the effective, or net, annual rental, after allowing for cost of management, taxes, all estate expenses and bad debts, would be no more than £7,000,000. This is a higher estimate than that made by Sir Robert Giffen and Archbishop Croke in 1886, but I give it as a probable maximum figure.

VII.

THE PRICE TO BE PAID TO THE LANDLORDS.

How many years purchase of this sum (or of a figure more accurately determined upon) should be given in compensation? Mr. T. W. Russell appears to think that an essential part of any plan standing a chance of acceptance from the landlords will be a rate of compensation which will insure to the selling landlord annual receipts from consols equal to his present income. This I venture to think, is a dangerous proposal, and one that should not be added to the many difficulties which the simplest plan will necessarily involve. If the landlords receive a fair compensation for what they are required to sell, a proposal to insure them an undiminished income for ever afterwards would be ridiculous. If they continue in their present position with revenues steadily diminishing as a result of external competition their incomes must go down with decreasing rents. They are asked now to sell under conditions of popular feeling which will probably secure them several years more purchase for their lands than the current market price. What more can Mr. Russell in reason demand for them?

In one other way they can, it is true, be helped, but not at the expense of Irish agricultural industry; and I think this is a better way than Mr. Russell's plan of increasing the number of years purchase too largely beyond a reasonable degree of generosity.

What cripples the resources of the greater number of the landlords is the extent to which their properties are

mortgaged. Probably more than half the annual rental of Irish estates is swallowed up in interest upon these mortgages. This is the result of past family extravagances, and not in any way on account of outlay or expenditure in the improvement of land or in kindred efforts to those which English landlords feel it their duty to make in helping agricultural industry. With all their past criminal follies and neglect of the land the Irish landlords were still "the English garrison" in times when they were politically powerful. They are not of much use in that way now to England, and their past services, even or because these were inimical and injurious to the Irish people, might appeal for consideration to Englishmen now in the matter of these heavy mortgages. If, as a part of a final settlement of the agrarian war, and only in that connection, the British Parliament should be asked to loan them money at low interest with which to redeem these charges, none of their former opponents would be likely to raise opposition to such a scheme. Perhaps Mr. Russell would find a better chance of winning the landlords into a more favourable selling mood on these lines than on those which would call on the Irish farmer rather than on Imperial credit to help to pay the landlords' debts.

As the price of peace, I would favour the giving of 21 years' purchase of the effective, or net, rental on the second term judicial-rent basis. Taking the estimated sum of £7,000,000 as representing the possible total net annual income for the landlords, twenty-one years' purchase of this would mean a capital sum of about £150,000,000 (£147,000,000).

VIII.

HOW TO LIQUIDATE THE DEBT.

WE could in all fairness ask the Imperial Parliament, in view of the finding of the Financial Relations Commission, to loan its credit for this amount to an Irish local authority, representative of the country and of the interests concerned, at a low interest, seeing that the money could easily be borrowed by the Treasury at $2\frac{1}{2}$.

To liquidate this debt I would charge the Irish tenant, "and Ireland" conjointly, $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. annually on this sum, in these proportions: For the tenants, an annual payment during the period of redemption equal to $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. upon 14 years' purchase, or two-thirds, of the whole, say £100,000,000.

For Ireland, $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. upon the remaining 7 years' purchase, £50,000,000. A perpetual rent-charge equal to this obligation to accrue annually to Ireland from the land after the liquidation of the land-settlement loan to the British Exchequer.

The respective annual charges pending the redemption of the debt would be:—

For the tenants, £3,500,000 in annual payments, or fully 50 per cent. of a reduction upon present judicial rents.

For Ireland, a little over £1,500,000, to be paid from sources which I shall presently indicate.

After the liquidation of the debt the rent-charge on the land to remain at this sum of one million and a

half, which would represent a perpetual reduction of over 80 per cent. on the existing judicial rents for the occupying owners.

To enable "Ireland," or the country, to purchase this one-third of the landlords' interest, so as to retain in the hands of the Nation the power to prevent usury in land, and sub-letting, and to give to the whole industrial community a direct interest and advantage in the soil of the country, I would propose to divert the following annual expenditure on present Irish administration into a National land-redemption fund :—

1. The grants out of (Ireland's contribution to) the Imperial Exchequer in relief of the payment of rates secured to landlords and tenants under the provisions of the Local Government Act of 1898 ; the buying out of the landlords and the above estimated reduction in tenants' payments in lieu of present rents rendering the continuation of such grants unnecessary and unfair to the general community ;

2. A saving to the amount of, say, one-third of the present cost of the Royal Irish Constabulary, by reducing the force to that extent ;

3. Large economies in the present cost of the Land Commission ;

4. Ditto in the reduction of the scandalously overmanned judicial Bench, the Corps of Removables, Resident Magistrates, and County Court Judges ;

5. Substantial economies upon a scheme for such an amalgamation of workhouses as would reduce the present number one-half.

IX.

A REPRESENTATIVE COMMISSION.

To carry this scheme of final land settlement into effect I would propose the appointment of a representative and competent Commission, comprising—

Mr. Thomas Sexton,
 The O'Conor Don,
 Mr. Land Commission Murrough O'Brien,
 Lord Castletown,
 Mr. John Dillon, M.P.,
 Mr. T. W. Russell, M.P., and
 Mr. James M'Cann, M.P.,

seven thoroughly representative men embracing the most eminent financial experts, the ablest landlords, staunchest Nationalists and trusted loyalists of the country.

 X.

A NATIONAL LAND COUNCIL.

A PERMANENT National Land Council would be required to administer the new land system. This should be thoroughly representative in election, composition and character, and would constitute what Mr. Chamberlain calls the "local authority" that would be held responsible for the due execution of the new land law. It should possess all the powers, and would necessarily supercede by virtual amalgamation, the existing Land Commission, the Agricultural Department, the Con-

gested Districts Board, and the powers under the Agricultural Labourers' Dwellings Acts vested in the Local Government Board.

The National Land Council might be elected in a manner somewhat similar to that provided in Section 8, Part II., of the Agricultural and Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act; two members to be elected by each County and Borough Council, and one person nominated for each county by the Lord Lieutenant; the members thus elected and nominated from each Province to form Provincial Committees in the Council. The limited nominating power to reside in the Lord Lieutenant during the period of the liquidation of the purchase debt to the Imperial Exchequer, after which the whole Land Council should be elected by the County and Borough Councils, or the country directly.

XI.

REASONS SUPPORTING THE SCHEME.

I WOULD justify the sweeping reduction in rent upon land which the foregoing proposals would provide, on several grounds:—

1. Rent has been and is levied upon the tenants' improvements and property in his holding contrary to justice.

2. The new rents would make further strikes for abatements impossible by removing all rational grounds for such movements.

3. Irish agricultural industry rightly demands a full and effective relief from discouraging conditions and burthens.

4. The extent of the rent-relief thus given would facilitate the levying of the necessary local rates by the local bodies, and would render easy the imposition of special rates in aid of technical and other education by the County Councils if such are required in the future.

5. The lightness of the rental burthen on the land would increase the wages of agricultural labour.

6. The comparatively small annual payment by the farmers of the country would make the security for the land settlement loan all the greater, and would enhance the value of the land stock in the money market.

XII.

A HOMESTEAD LAW.

OBJECTIONS are likely to be taken to the proposal which makes the country, as an industrial whole, responsible for one-third of the loan with which to emancipate the tenants from their present condition. It may and will be urged that the "predominant partner" ought to pay this £50,000,000 as conscience money to Ireland in return for robbery by taxation. The aforesaid partner has no conscience where money is concerned, and an appeal thereto is a foolish waste of moral energy.

An appeal for the concession of an Irish Republic would stand a better chance of being listened to by British taxpayers (if the concession would cost them nothing in cash) than a demand for a restitution of stolen taxes.

My conviction is that "the partner" will all the more readily loan the necessary credit for the final settlement of the agrarian war when he finds that it will be an uncommonly good bargain for himself; inasmuch as his said credit will have an absolute security in the nature and conditions of the loan, in the provision of over a million a year for liquidation, and in the greater moral security guaranteed by the ending of the land war between the landlords and tenantry of Ireland.

I believe, too, that Ireland would receive in exchange for the moneys now expended upon fruitless public services ten times their value, in even the first ten years of agrarian peace, under the new land system here proposed. The proposed payment of one-third the price of peace and of new conditions of progress by Ireland would also mean in the near future a solid National asset in the rent-charge revenue, which would enable the country to promote and foster her industrial welfare.

Looked at in a rational light this proposal would be but an investment of £50,000,000 in "the going concern" of a regenerated industrial Ireland from which dividends would be as certain to come as from the surest of gilt-edged securities.

I would make a Homestead Law a cognate part of the new land system. Such a law exists in Canada, within the British Empire, and is therefore no new or revolu-

tionary proposal. It is more needed in Ireland than in the prospering Dominion over the Atlantic. The homes of our peasantry are the nurseries of whatever distinctive virtues our race possess (be the same, at the present day, more or less), and these racial and moral qualities would be strengthened in freeing the domestic hearthstone from the fears of eviction.

Evictions would necessarily all but disappear, under the new land system, but it would be essential in more ways than one to provide by law against the temptation of the emancipated peasant to mortgage his home and property in the land in reckless borrowing of money. A Homestead Law, by legally making such loans irrecoverable on a tenant's home, working utensils, &c., would effectively safeguard the family rights in that home.

A law against sub-letting, except under circumstances and conditions approved of by the National Land Council, would also be a necessary and essential part of the proposed new land system.

XIII.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.

FINALLY : The extent to which any scheme of enlarged land purchase, voluntary or compulsory, may be considered or carried out as a result of the present frame of mind of the landlords and the country, and the possible action of Parliament thereon, would necessarily render a corresponding modification of the proposals contained in this pamphlet.

The landlords will probably wish to retain their mansions and home farms under any new land system which may come into existence with their co-operation. The most relentless Land Leaguer would have no opposition to, but would welcome, such a feature of the new condition of things. This, however, would lessen the value of the property the landlord has to sell, and would therefore require a proportionately smaller amount of national credit to purchase.

It might also appear wise to the suggested Commission to commence operations with, or to limit them for a period to, those estates comprising the smaller holdings of the country, and the grazing ranches from which, in the West especially, the necessary land for the enlargement of holdings under, say, ten or fifteen acres would have to be obtained.

A division of the task of settling the Land Question would draw the line of operations between holdings of £20 and under, and those over that figure. Sir James Caird, in 1886, gave the (then) total annual rental of the 500,000 holdings of the first category at about £3,500,000. This figure has, of course, been reduced by rent abatements and purchase considerably since then, and will probably not reach the round figures of £3,000,000 now.

I have endeavoured by aid of the Agricultural Statistics of Ireland to find out the number and probable rental valuation of all the holdings of Ireland under 30 acres, but the results give me no reliable figures.

I make out about 280,000 tenancies from 1 to 15 acres, and some 130,000 from 15 to 30; a total of 400,000, in round numbers, of 30 acres and under.

The present nominal rental of these would, probably, be under £3,000,000, while the effective income to the owners for the same would be (these comprising the most troublesome properties) not more than £2,500,000.

Twenty-one years' purchase of this figure would be about £52,000,000; the annual charge on which, at the rate of $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. interest and provision for sinking fund, would amount to about £1,800,000, or something like the sum Ireland could herself provide out of her misspent taxes, as already explained in dealing with the proposed scheme of complete land settlement.

All which sundry suggestions are respectfully put forward, with however the needed explanation that this pamphlet is hurriedly put together on the eve of my departure for the United States, and that I have not, in consequence, been able to submit my figures and calculations to the scrutiny of expert examination.

All the pamphlet hopes to do is to offer suggestions to the public with whom so much of the responsibility and power rests for the effective settlement of the Irish agrarian war.

XIV.

A NATIONAL CONFERENCE SUGGESTED.

I STILL believe that a National Conference of a truly representative character ought to be summoned early next year to consider this whole great question, and I therefore append the letter which I wrote a short time

ago to the press recommending such a gathering, not as a rival but as a necessary supplement to the practical proposal made by Captain Shawe-Taylor :—

“The momentous admission of the latest English Chief Secretary for Ireland—that the settlement of the Irish Land Question cannot be effected by any English Government, but can be carried out by Irishmen in Ireland—invests with exceptional importance proposals which invite representatives of landlords and tenants to meet and consider how best to perform a task so vitally essential to the peace and progress of the country. I am one who believes that Mr. Wyndham’s declaration alone calls for a Conference. It may be, and in one sense is, a confession of England’s complete failure to fulfil one of the highest functions of Constitutional rule ; but, in any case, it is a direct challenge to Irishmen to attempt to do what their alien rulers proclaim themselves unable to accomplish.

“I believe this challenge should be accepted, and accepted in a National, but non-party, sense.

“There are at present two proposed Conferences before the public—that of Captain Shawe-Taylor’s, which is arbitrary in its selection of representatives on behalf of the two classes chiefly concerned in the problem to be solved, landlords and tenants ; and that of Lord Mayo’s, which calls for an elective and representative body of men to speak for the same two classes. Both proposals are alike admirable in the spirit in which they were conceived and in the purpose at which they aim. But it is in no sense a disparagement of either or both plans, or of their proposers, or of those named in con-

nection with one plan, to say that neither Conference, if held, could claim to do more than speak for itself, and could not be accepted by all the interests involved in the Irish Land Question as speaking with the authority of a National voice or judgment.

“Captain Shawe-Taylor’s plan has, along with this, the defect of naming three landlord representatives the most unlikely of their order to accept the invitation extended to them. Three others of less social and political importance would not, presumably, fulfil the conditions which the proposer had before his mind when also naming three such very influential pro-tenant representatives as Messrs. Redmond, O’Brien, and Russell.”

“Lord Mayo’s plan is, I think, admittedly impracticable in its present shape, though its scheme of representation is on the right lines in seeking the essential element which can render a conference more or less effective for its purpose—namely, an authoritative voice with which to speak the kind of settlement that is most likely to meet with National approval, and which would appeal, as such, with strongest force to whatever Ministry or party may be inclined, or induced, to legislate for an Irish settlement upon Irish lines.

“Lord Mayo does not indicate how the landlords, on the one hand, or the tenants, on the other, are to elect their respective non-Parliamentary delegates to his Conference. Such delegates must, as a matter of obvious necessity, be taken from accidental but acceptable representation already in existence, such as the Parliamentary delegation upon which Lord Mayo largely relies for his

plan, or from the County Councils, which would offer, in my humble opinion, a better field of selection for tenant-farmer delegates fully qualified to speak for their class .

“Neither Captain Shawe-Taylor’s nor Lord Mayo’s plan considers the agricultural labouring class as an interest calling for or entitled to representation at the Conference. It is, of course, a relatively subordinate interest, and no blame attaches to the proposers of the plans before us for confining the deliberations of such small bodies as those contemplated to the spokesmen of the classes most vitally interested in the solution of the land problem. But these labourers are also to be taken into account in the matter, and must of political necessity, as well as of right, be considered in their views and claims by whatever authority, Irish or British, assumes the task of proposing or planning how the chief industry of Ireland is to be placed upon a more or less final and permanent basis.

“What I would respectfully suggest is a Conference in the form and character of a National Council, to be representative of the classes most immediately interested, and, as far as possible, of the country also: this Council to meet in Dublin, and to be called on the understanding that it was to deal exclusively with the one subject—namely, “How best, and soonest, to bring about a satisfactory solution of the Irish Land Question.”

“I would propose the following scheme of representation for such a body:—One member to be deputed by each County Council in Ireland, 32; one from the City Councils of Dublin, Belfast, Derry, Limerick, and

Cork, 5 ; one each from the Chambers of Commerce of the same cities, 5 ; ten members each from the Landlords' Convention and the Directory of the United Irish League, 20 ; five from the Land and Labour Associations, 5 ; and one each from the Trades Councils of Dublin, Belfast, Derry, Limerick, and Cork, 5 ; total delegated representatives, 72.

“This number is but the total of the contributing sources of representation, and possesses no virtue in itself. I would propose to give to this body when it assembled the power to co-opt 28 more members, so as to make the Council an assembly of 100 ; this power of co-option to be exercised so as (in obedience to a sense of fair play) to correct any undue preponderance of class delegation which the basis of representation might give to any single interest or class. It would likewise be necessary to resort to such co-option in order to insure the presence of men of recognised standing or authority in the land reform and pro-landlord movements respectively.

“I differ widely on most questions of principle and policy with Mr. T. M. Healy, M.P., but I would not consider a conference called for a National effort to settle the Land Question a satisfactory one from which he might be excluded. The same remark applies with, at least, equal force to the names of Mr. Thomas Sexton and Mr. A. J. Kettle, who are not members of Parliament or of any County or City Council.

“I believe, however, that the feeling of such a body as would be brought together on the plan of representation here suggested, would be chiefly influenced, in

the exercise of the power of co-optation, in giving to the landlord, or unpopular, class such a hearing in weight and in numbers as would tend to redress any manifestly unfair balance of parties which the County Council delegation might create against the territorial interest.

“The proceedings of the Conference ought to be deliberative and open to the Press. There should be no binding obligation upon any section of the Council in any final decision as to rival plans of settlement, the purpose of the Conference being solely to attempt, in a National sense, to frame a scheme of reform for the country which might form, in whole or in part, a foundation for such a legislative measure as should end the agrarian war.

“What would happen at such a Council would, in all likelihood, be this: All classes and interests would advocate, and obtain a hearing for, their respective plans and schemes. Possibly, though very improbably, one plan of settlement might meet with a general acceptance by means of some opportune compromise or concession from one side or another. But the more likely outcome of the deliberations would be two or three rival schemes of proposals, such as come from some Parliamentary Committees or Royal Commissions in the form of Majority and Minority Reports.

“In any case, assuming, as we reasonably can, that good temper and common-sense would characterise the proceedings, there could not fail to result from the meeting of such a representative Council, in session for a week if necessary, most useful light and leading from experienced and educated Irish opinion, for those

who are almost certain to have to face in the next Parliament, if not before, the labour of attempting to bring to an end the ruinous system of dual ownership in the use of the land of Ireland.

“There are involved in the final solution of this vast question three considerations of vital National importance to the future peace and industrial welfare of the country—namely, the kind of settlement which is to be effected; the terms of settlement, and especially whether the future occupying owners are or are not to be permitted to job the land of the country as well as their own property therein; to sub-let the land again and to re-create at will another kind of rent-earning tenancy to the injury of the country’s paramount interest in the source of the nation’s chief industry, and to the recrudescence of agrarian unrest.

“These are all considerations which affect Ireland in its industrial, as well as in its social and National, welfare. It will, therefore, be an evidence of a thoughtless and stupid want of intelligent foresight and self-interest on the part of the country should any plan of final settlement be put forward, by any body of men, without the same being fully examined, criticised and weighed by the standard of how Ireland at large will be most benefited in the method and manner of effecting so great a domestic reform.

“Such a National Council as is here suggested could give to any proposed scheme of settlement an examination stamped with some National authority, and would enunciate or recommend such proposals and suggestions as would be both an answer to Mr. Wyndham’s challenge

and a valuable guidance to whatever party or statesmen will face the duty of solving this great question in the next Parliament.

“ Yours, &c.,

APPENDIX.

MR. JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN'S PLAN.

IN a series of articles contributed to the *Birmingham Daily Post* in 1888 by Mr. Chamberlain, and re-published in pamphlet form under the title of “The Condition of Ireland: A Sketch of Unionist Policy,” the present Colonial Secretary elaborated the views he had previously expressed on Sir Robert Giffen's plan, and reduced them to the following proposals (Pamphlet No. 2, pages 76, 77):—

“To sum up, we put, in the following propositions, the objects to be aimed at in any measure for the solution of the Irish Land Question:—

“1. To make the tenant practically the owner of his holding, subject to an ultimate fixed payment, or land tax, of a moderate amount, and to conditions which it may be in the interest of the State to impose, in order to prevent subdivision and the growth of encumbrances.

“2. To give to the present owner of the land its fair capital value, in a security easily marketable at par.

“ 3. To relieve the British taxpayer from all risk of loss.

“ 4. To interpose a local authority as creditor of the tenant, with direct interest in enforcing payment of any rent or tax which may be imposed.

“ 5. To make the tenant debtor to an Irish local authority, instead of to an individual landlord, often an absentee.

“ 6. To secure the proper use of the land, and prevent undue subdivision, by the action of the local authority, in the interest of the whole community.

“ 7. To ascertain the true market value of estates as a basis for compensation, with special regard to the circumstances of each estate.

“ 8. To secure present relief to the tenant by an immediate reduction of rent.

“ 9. To relieve congested districts by a rearrangement of the smaller holdings where these are insufficient to provide means of existence for a family.”



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